



Make Mothers Matter

State of motherhood in Europe 2024

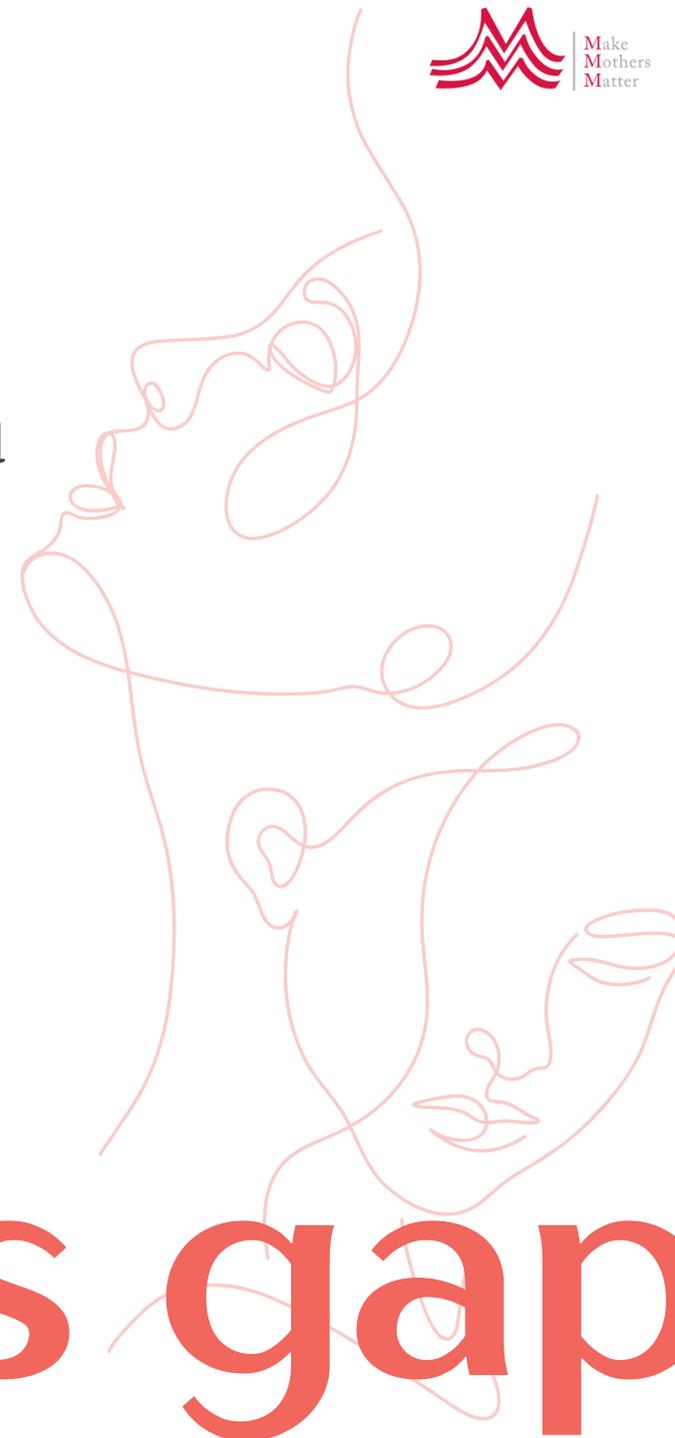
Overlooked challenges, unmet needs

Results of the 2024 survey

Based on a study conducted by Kantar and commissioned by MMM

Introduction

Motherhood remains an underexplored and insufficiently addressed topic in both policymaking and societal discourse. The lack of comprehensive data on mothers intensifies the challenges of crafting effective policies that address their unique needs and realities. To bridge this gap, MMM has launched the State of Motherhood in Europe - 2024 survey report.



bridge this gap

Introduction

This survey examines the evolving experiences and challenges of motherhood across Europe, drawing insights from **9,600 mothers in 11 EU countries**—Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden—as well as the UK.

Despite progress under the European Union's Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, which introduced initiatives such as the Work-Life Balance Directive(1), the Pay Transparency Directive(2) and the Women's on board Directive(3) as well as the EU Care Strategy(4) and the EU Communication Mental Health(5), significant gaps remain at institutional (much of the success of these initiatives depends on the implementation at the national level), private and social level.

The report tackles critical questions: What are the realities of motherhood today? What are the most pressing challenges mothers face? How can families, workplaces, and society adapt to better support mothers in balancing their diverse roles?

By addressing these questions, the report seeks not only to inform but also to **inspire meaningful action from policymakers, employers, and society at large, fostering a more equitable and supportive environment for mothers.**

Key Findings

Motherhood brings profound changes to a woman's life, significantly affecting personal, family, and professional dynamics. The State of motherhood in Europe 2024 highlights the following key findings:

50%

of mothers stated that they **suffer from mental problems** (depression, anxiety, burnout, peripartum depression, or other)

67%

of mothers report **feeling overloaded**

A majority of mothers experience mental health challenges

Key Findings

While mothers evolve in flexibility and adaptability, workplaces lag behind

23%

reduced their working hours, and 55% changed their working status after having a child

Only

35%

of mothers report benefiting from a gradual return to work, 46% from adapted working hours, and just 27% have access to teleworking options

Nearly

27%

of mothers state motherhood negatively impacted their careers

Key Findings

Family dynamics often place a disproportionate load on mothers

At least
63%

of household and caregiving tasks are handled by mothers alone (and up to 70%), regardless of their employment status

25%

of fathers took no paternity leave

Excluding fathers who had no paternity leave offered at that time or for whom it was not applicable, this percentage rises to 35%

Key Findings

29%

of mothers **are not satisfied with the duration of maternity leave** and 44% with the allowances received during the same period

41%

of mothers **find that their role is not recognized** by society

32%

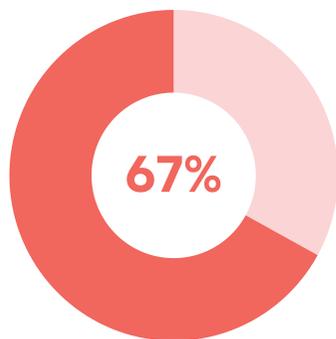
of mothers who decided not to breastfeed cited **breastfeeding difficulties** as a primary reason

Society support and policies still need to evolve

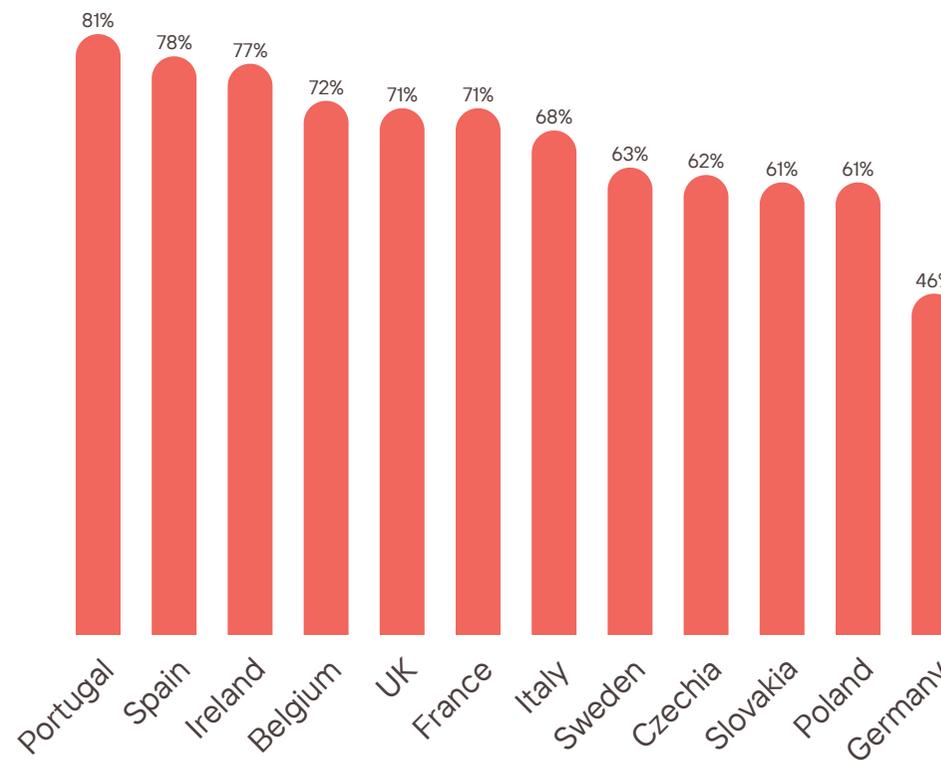
An alert on maternal mental health: the consequence of 3 major factors

More than 67% of mothers report feeling mentally overloaded, a condition especially prevalent among mothers aged 30-39, those with multiple children, young children (0-5), single mothers, and those in lower-income brackets.

At the country level, in Portugal, 81% of mothers report feeling this way, while in contrast, 46% of German mothers share the same sentiment.



of mothers feel mentally overloaded



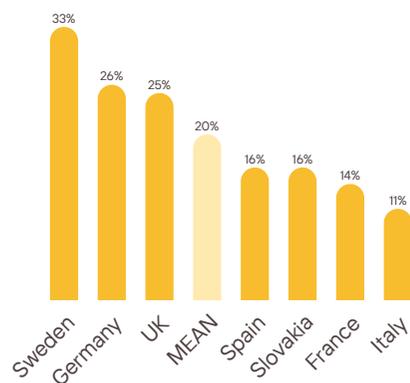
% of mothers feeling mentally overloaded by country

Did you experience any of the following mental health issues in the past year?



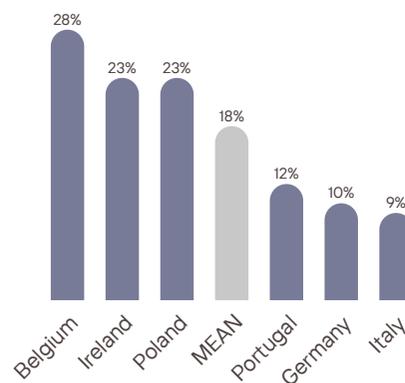
Anxiety

(Top 3/Bottom 3)



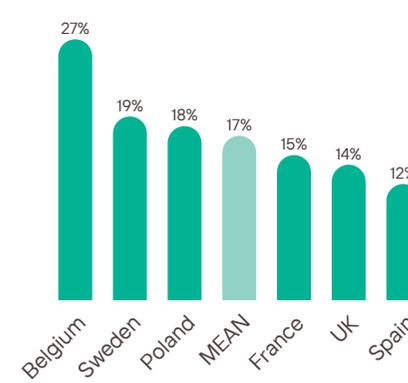
Depression

(Top 3/Bottom 3)



Burnout

(Top 3/Bottom 3)



Peripartum Depression

-among mothers with children under 1 year-

(Top 3/Bottom 3)

When asked, "Did you experience any of the following mental health issues in the past year?", **one in two mothers reported struggling with at least one of the following: depression, anxiety, burnout, peripartum depression, or "others"**, with tiredness and stress frequently mentioned in the open-ended responses.

At a country level, mothers in Sweden report the highest rates of depression, Spanish mothers of anxiety, and Belgian mothers of burn-out and peripartum depression.

Mothers facing mental health challenges emphasize “taking time for oneself” and “help from family” as crucial for their well-being. Yet, self-care remains out of reach for many, with only 51% of mothers saying they have enough time for themselves.

Often, they feel there is no support available:

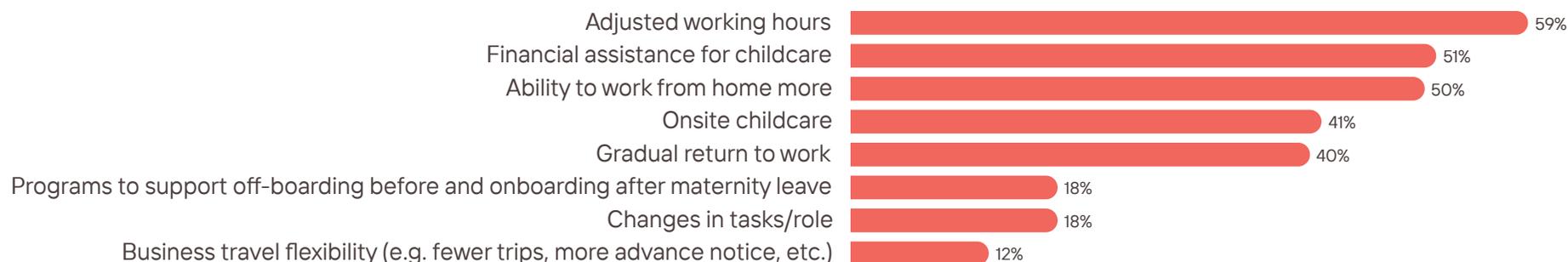
*“Personne, l’anxiété et le burn out même les médecins s’en foutent”
“Nobody, anxiety and burnout—even doctors don’t care.”*

“Nobody, I just had to get on with it.”

*“No one supported me, I always looked
(to myself) for the strength to get through this.”*

Factor 1: Workplace rigidity

Desired return to work benefits (among mothers who didn't receive them)



Return to work without transition

Returning to work presents unique challenges for mothers, who are **often expected to return to work "as if nothing had changed,"** disregarding the emotional and physical adjustments and the additional responsibility that comes with motherhood.

Only 35% reported benefiting from a gradual return to work, 46% from adapted working hours, and just 27% had access to teleworking options.

These figures highlight the critical need for more supportive policies that address the practical realities of working mothers.

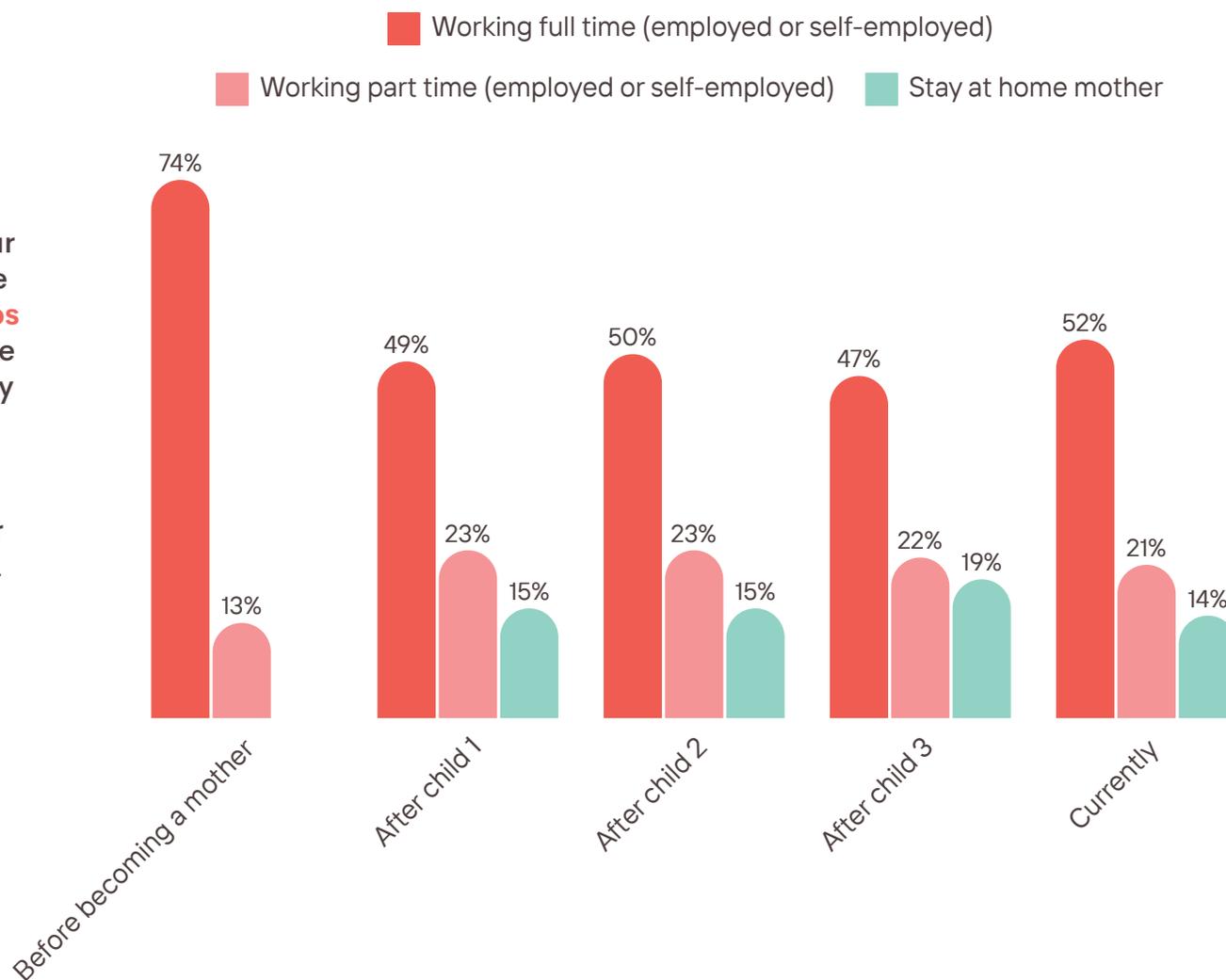
When asked which benefits would have supported their return to work but were not provided, more than half of mothers selected 'adjusted working hours,' 'financial assistance for childcare,' and 'the ability to work from home.'

Mothers adapting their working hours and status

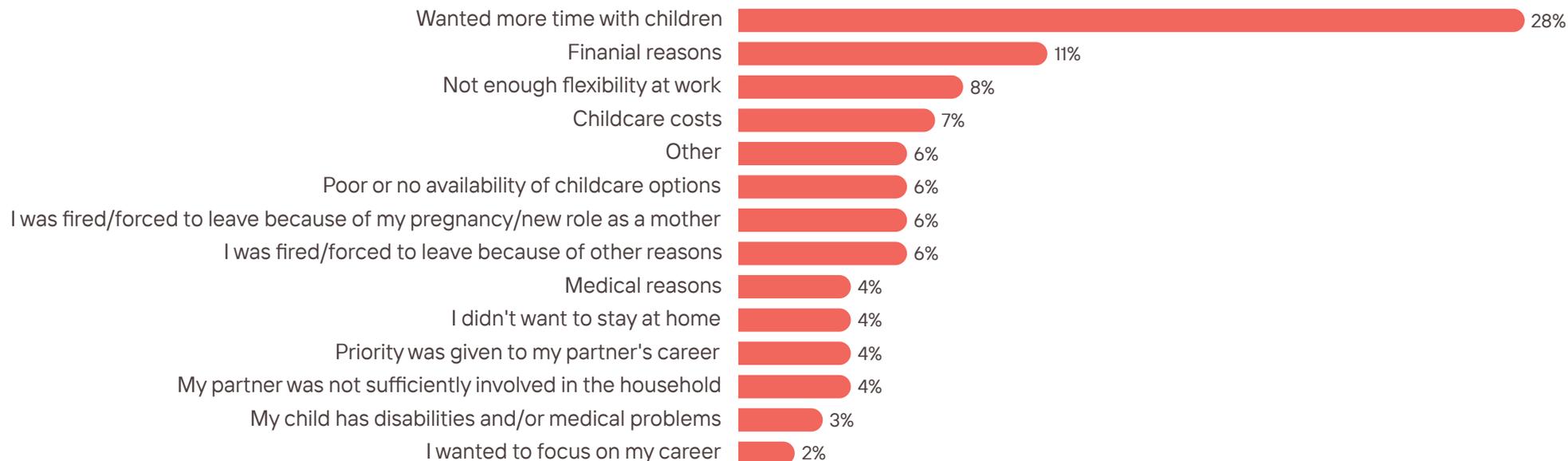
The arrival of the first child has a significant impact on a woman's career, as reflected in our figures. **Right after having their first child**, the percentage of **mothers working full time drops sharply from 74% to 49%**, with 15% leaving the workforce entirely. These figures remain largely unchanged over time, as currently only 52% of mothers work full time.

Mothers are most often the ones to adapt their working lives to meet the demands of raising a child, facing both financial consequences and stalled career progression in exchange for **greater flexibility**.

Working status at various life stages



No. 1 reason for mothers to change working status after a child



The number 1 reason for **28% of mothers who changed their working status** came down to **wanting to have more time with their child/children**. For the rest, external elements forced them to do so: some cited *financial constraints* (18%)—including the need to cover day-care costs (7%) and financial reasons (11%)—as a major factor, followed by 14% of mothers citing *work-related issues*—with 8% mentioning a lack of flexibility and **6% reporting being fired or forced to leave because of their new personal situation**—.

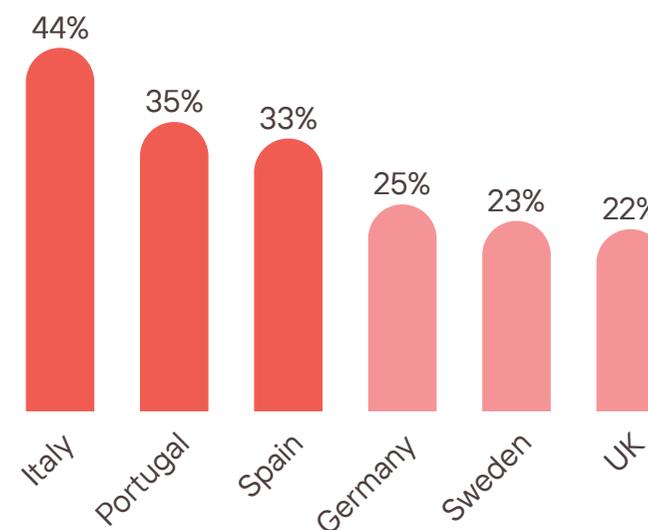
At the national level, the primary motivator for mothers to change their working status is strikingly consistent across countries: the desire to spend more time with their children. Financial considerations also rank among the top three reasons in 9 of the 12 surveyed countries.

Other reasons vary by region:

- **Lack of workplace flexibility** is a significant factor in countries like Spain, Italy, and Czechia
- **Limited or unavailable childcare options** heavily influence decisions in Poland, Germany, and Ireland
- **High childcare costs** are particularly significant in the UK, Ireland, and France

Changing their working status is not always a choice. In fact, 30% of surveyed mothers are not satisfied with it, ranging from 22% in the UK to 44% in Italy.

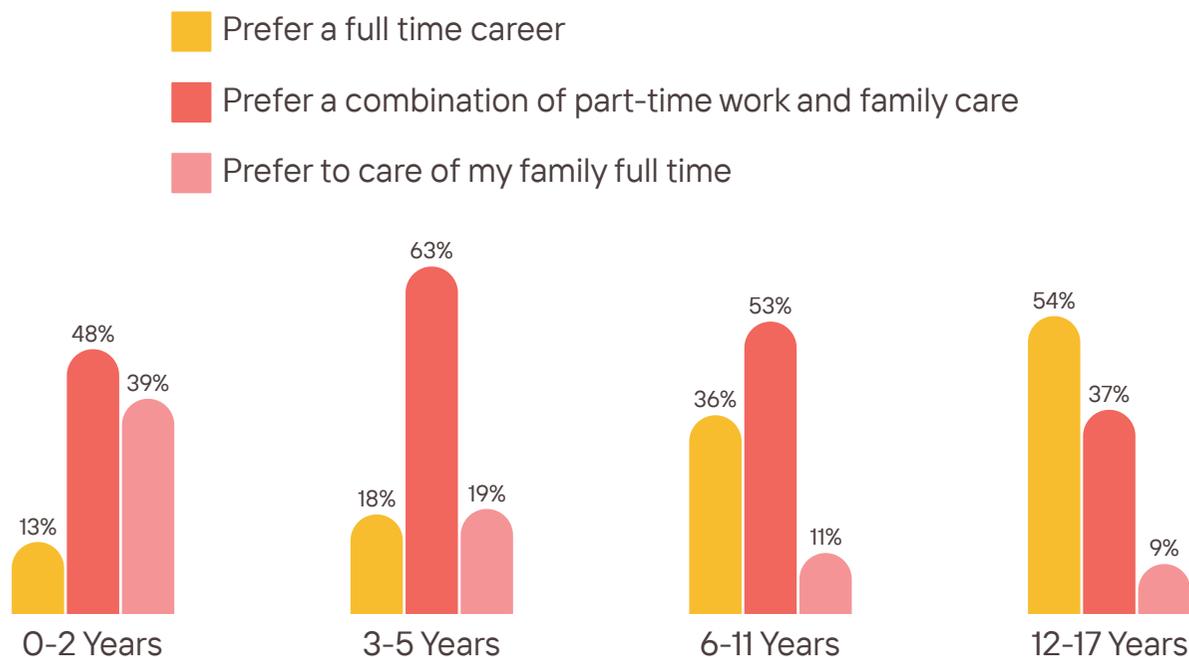
Mothers not satisfied with their working status (Top 3 / Bottom 3)



When asked about balancing professional and family responsibilities, mothers often express a preference to work part-time while dedicating time to caregiving, particularly until their youngest child reaches at least the age of 12.

This indicates that **a mother's professional journey tends to adapt to her family's evolving needs**, rather than following a steady, linear path.

These figures might vary from one country to another.



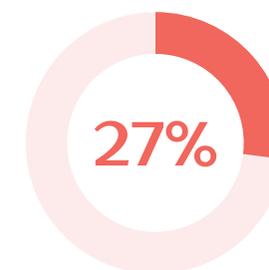
How would you prefer to balance work and family life for these periods of your child/children's lives?

The negative impact of motherhood on work: the motherhood penalty

More than one in four mothers (27% of the total sample) report that motherhood negatively impacted their work or career. This perception is most prevalent among mothers from Ireland (36%), Germany, and the UK (31%) each, who report the highest rates of negative impacts on their work due to motherhood.

As shown earlier, 23% of mothers in our report reduced their working hours, with many transitioning from full-time to part-time employment: they sacrifice career progression and rewards to have more control over their working time and gain flexibility. This shift has far-reaching implications:

- **Career stagnation:** 30% of surveyed mothers felt that their learning opportunities or progress had been restricted. This stagnation, that affects long-term career trajectories, often leads to frustration and emotional strain, adding to the burden many mothers face
- **Financial impact:** 39% of mothers reported a decrease in their regular income, often while maintaining the same level of responsibility. This not only affects their current and potential earnings but also has long-term consequences on pension entitlements
- **Reduced job quality:** as part-time jobs are usually of a poorer quality, with less autonomy and less flexibility(6)



of mothers stated motherhood has negatively affected their work/career



Negative impact of motherhood on work – effects on career progression

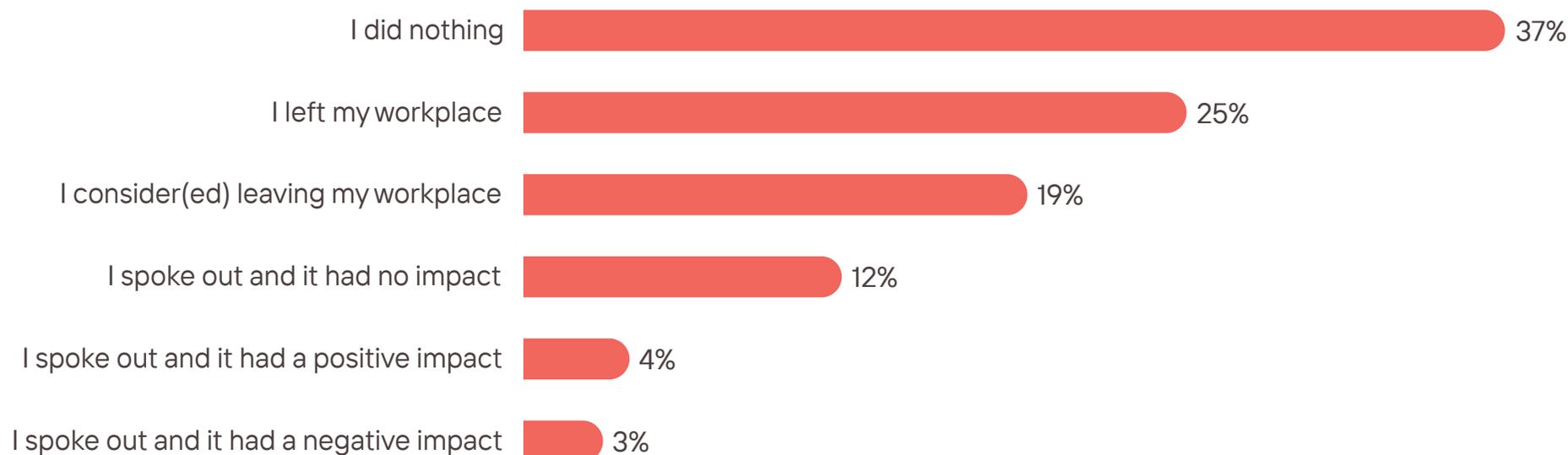


Negative impact of motherhood on work – effects on finances

Mothers facing the negative impact of motherhood on their careers often accept it, with 37% taking no action to address these challenges.

This lack of response is not merely a result of passivity but stems from practical barriers such as the high cost of legal assistance, limited time to navigate complex systems, insufficient knowledge about support mechanisms to challenge these injustices effectively, or fear of retaliation—such as job loss, reduced opportunities for promotion, or salary stagnation.

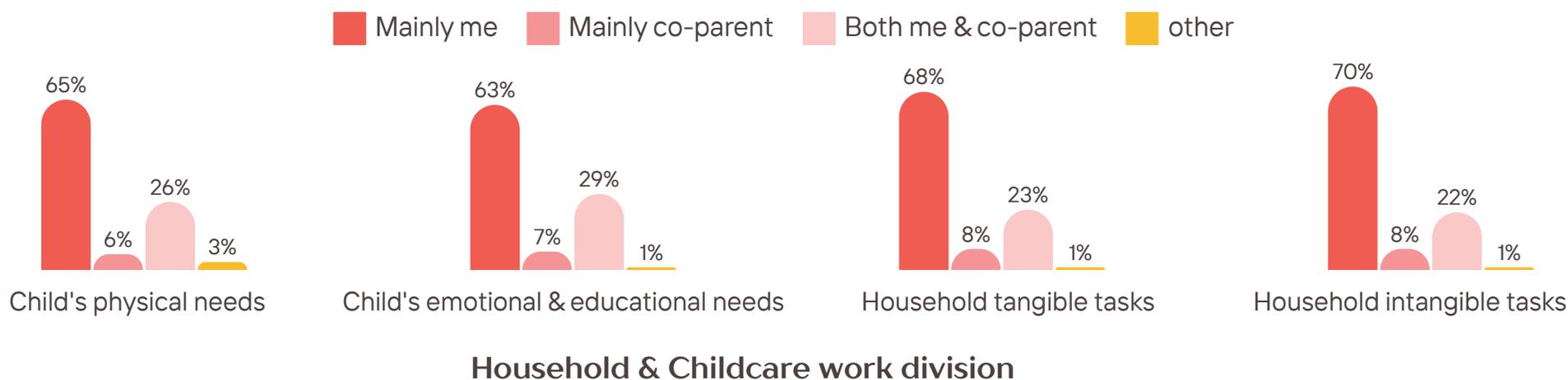
Actions taken by mothers due to negative effects of motherhood on their careers (%)



Factor 2: Unbalanced family dynamics

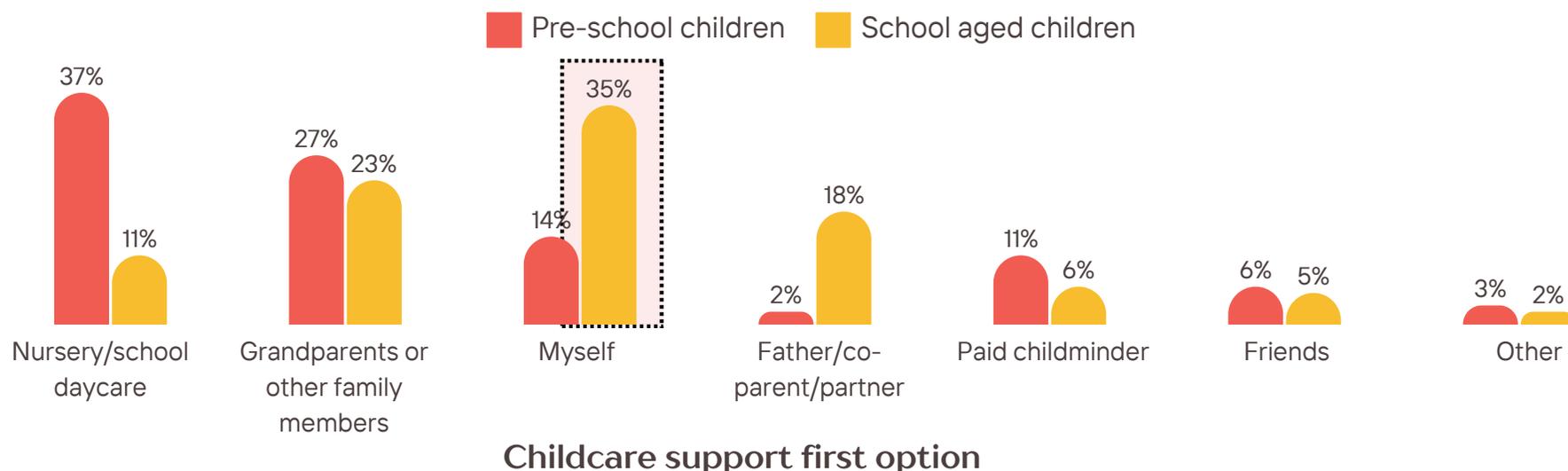
Persistent gender inequalities in the household

Our report identifies a persistent imbalance in household responsibilities, with mothers disproportionately managing both tangible tasks (e.g., cooking, cleaning) and intangible responsibilities (e.g., planning, organizing), whether these mothers are working outside the home or not.



When focusing on **childcare**, the **source of support** varies based on the age of the child. Parents of preschool-aged children typically rely on preschools, daycares, and family members, especially working mothers and mothers of children aged 3 to 5.

As children reach school age, parental involvement becomes more prominent, with **mothers continuing to take on the primary caregiving role**. This underscores that mothers remain the primary caregivers, even as their children grow.



It is also important to note that **25% of mothers state that they live with household members with additional care needs**, whether it is a child or another adult (including themselves).

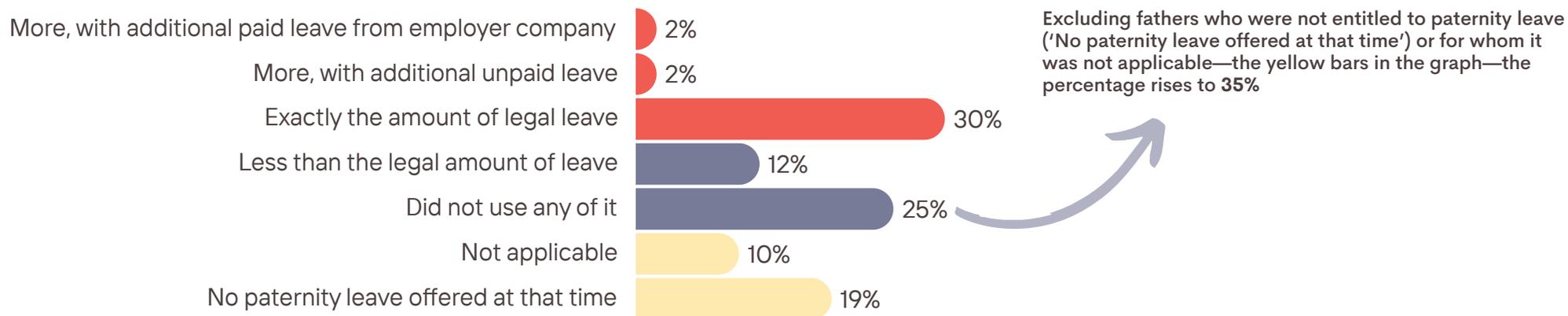
This situation could be due to disability or health conditions (physical or mental) or other reasons. This adds to the overall caregiving workload and emotional strain many mothers face, further complicating their ability to balance personal, professional, and familial responsibilities.

Insufficient and underused leave

Despite recent advancements in parental leave policies, **paternity leave remains insufficient**. Current provisions fail to meet the specific needs of diverse families and often lack adequate compensation. Additionally, paternity leave is significantly underutilized in many countries.

This underutilisation perpetuates imbalanced caregiving roles within families, leaving mothers to shoulder a disproportionate share of household and childcare responsibilities, while also missing the opportunity for fathers to build a stronger bond with their child and to gain awareness of the value and effort involved in caregiving work.

25% of fathers did not take any paternity leave, mainly due to financial concerns (42%) and workload pressures (26%).



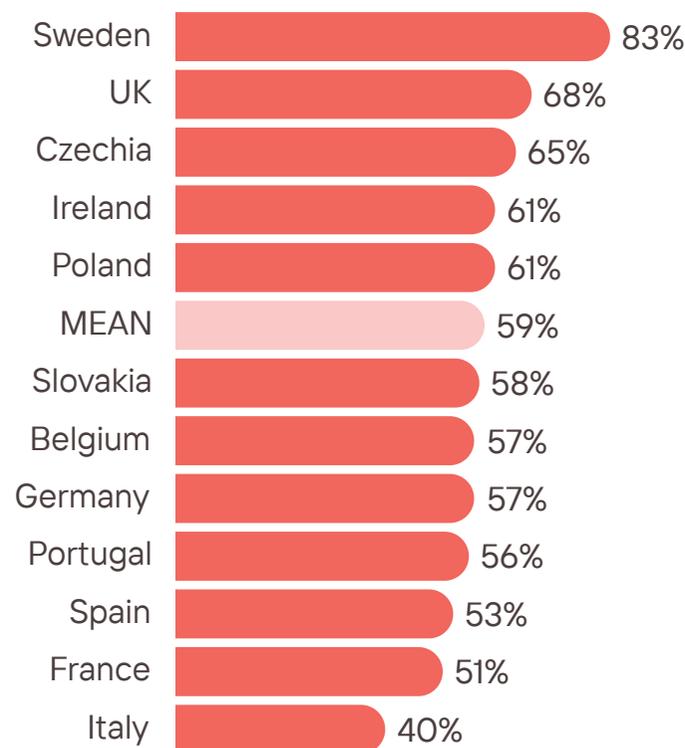
Paternity leave used by father/coparent

Factor 3: Insufficient societal and policy support

Feeling of (lack of) recognition

80% of emotive words used by mothers to describe parenting were positive, using words such as "love," "joy," and "happiness", while also reporting feelings of "fatigue" and "sacrifice".

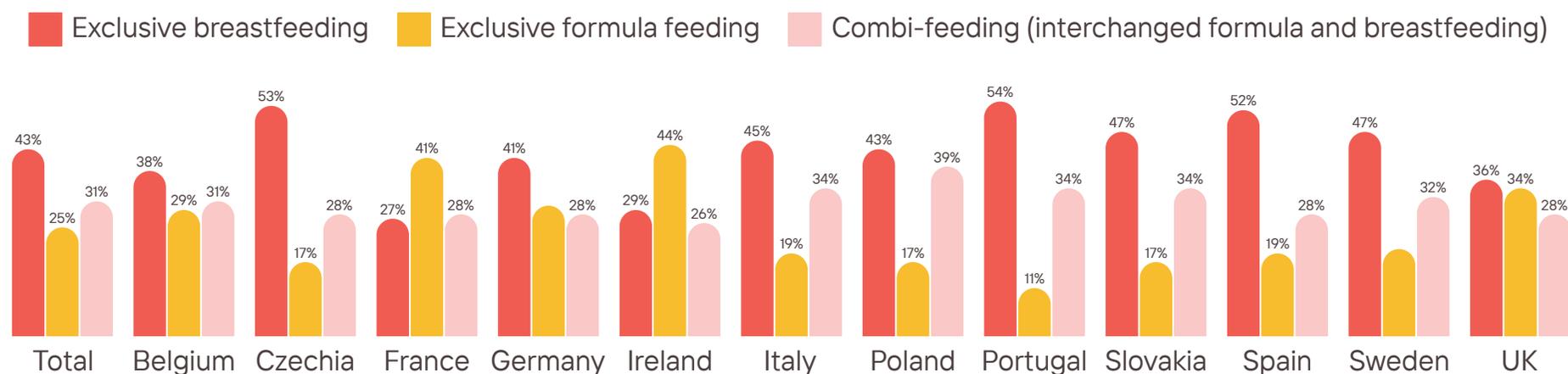
Still, 41% of mothers feel underappreciated by society, with perceptions varying significantly across countries.



Recognition of motherhood role by society across countries

Breastfeeding challenges

Almost all mothers (96%) in the survey, regardless of working status or occupation, stated that they personally feel/felt **satisfied with their choice of how to feed their baby**. Mothers in general prioritise breastfeeding or combi-feeding during the first six months of the baby's life, with some exceptions like France and Ireland, where exclusive formula feeding is most common.



Feeding choice in the first 6 months of a baby's life

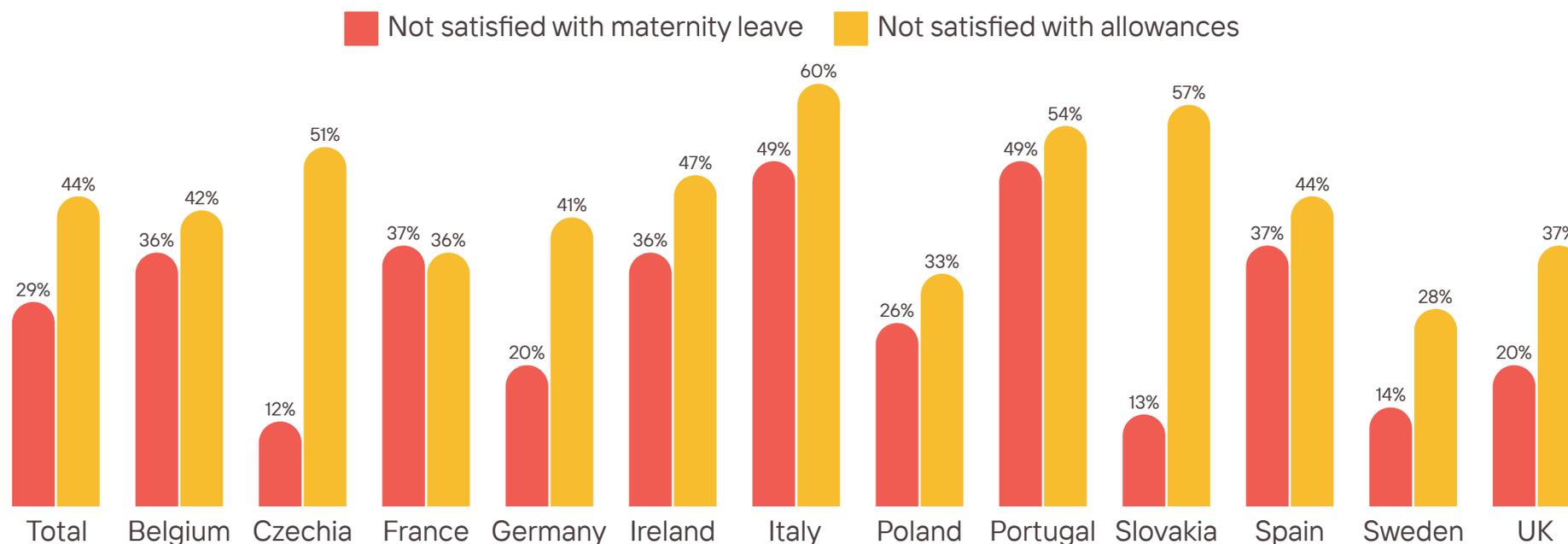
But breastfeeding may not be as natural as it looks and **can be a challenging experience for many mothers**. Among the 25% of mothers who exclusively formula-fed, 46% cited "personal reasons," 44% reported "breastfeeding difficulties," and 18% mentioned medical reasons (either their own or their baby's). Similarly, among mothers who stopped breastfeeding earlier than they wished, 48% pointed to "breastfeeding difficulties," while 16% cited "medical reasons".

Common breastfeeding challenges include issues with latching, low milk supply, pain, or infections such as mastitis. Without **proper guidance and support**, these problems can lead to early weaning, despite the mother's desire to continue breastfeeding.

Insufficient maternity leave and allowances

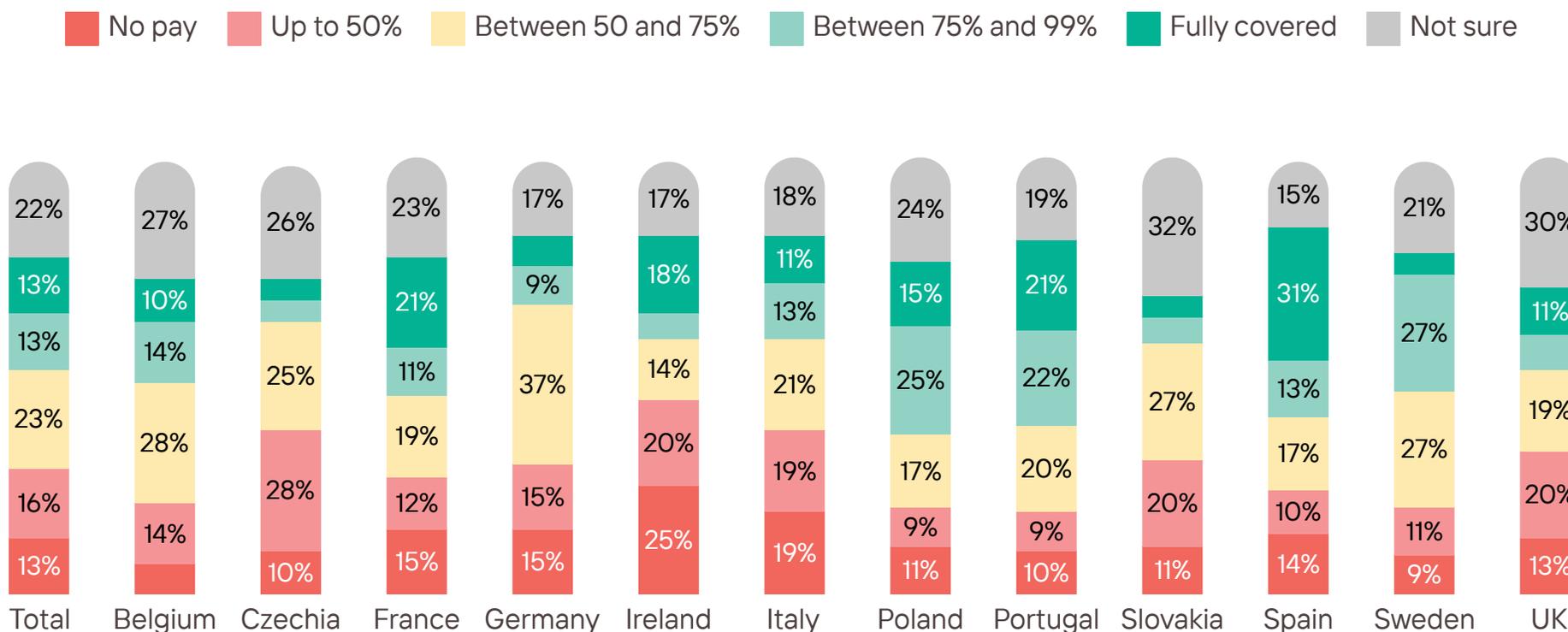
Many mothers face challenges with insufficient time to recover and care for their newborns. According to our report, 30% of mothers find maternity leave insufficient (rising to 49% in Portugal and Italy). Additionally, 44% feel the leave is poorly compensated, with dissatisfaction reaching 60% among mothers in Italy, 57% in Slovakia, and 54% in Portugal.

Despite this, mothers are more likely to extend their maternity leave, even if it is unpaid: 14% did so, compared with only 4% of fathers.



Dissatisfaction with maternity leave and allowances by country

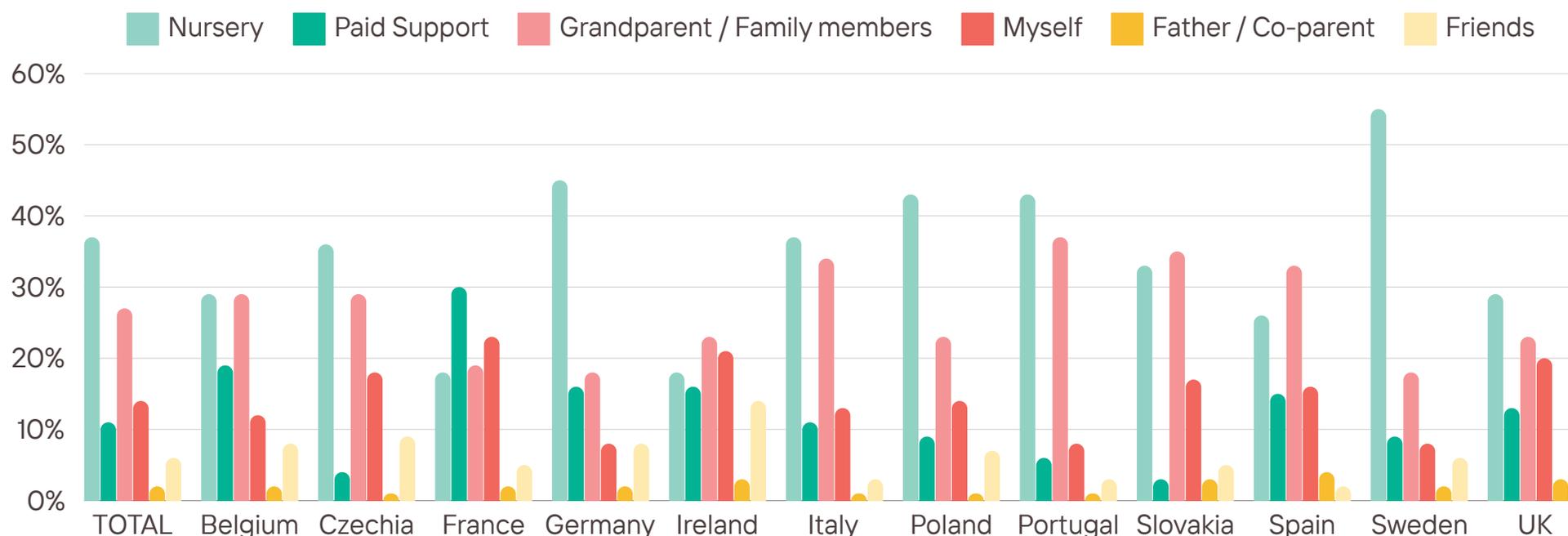
When asked about the average percentage of their salary received during maternity leave (regardless of the institution providing it), **only 13% of mothers received 100% of their salary**, and 13% received more than 75%. Spanish mothers stand out, with 31% reporting they received 100% of their usual salary during maternity leave, compared to only 5% of Slovakian mothers.



**Incomes during maternity leave by country
(regardless wicth institution it came from)**

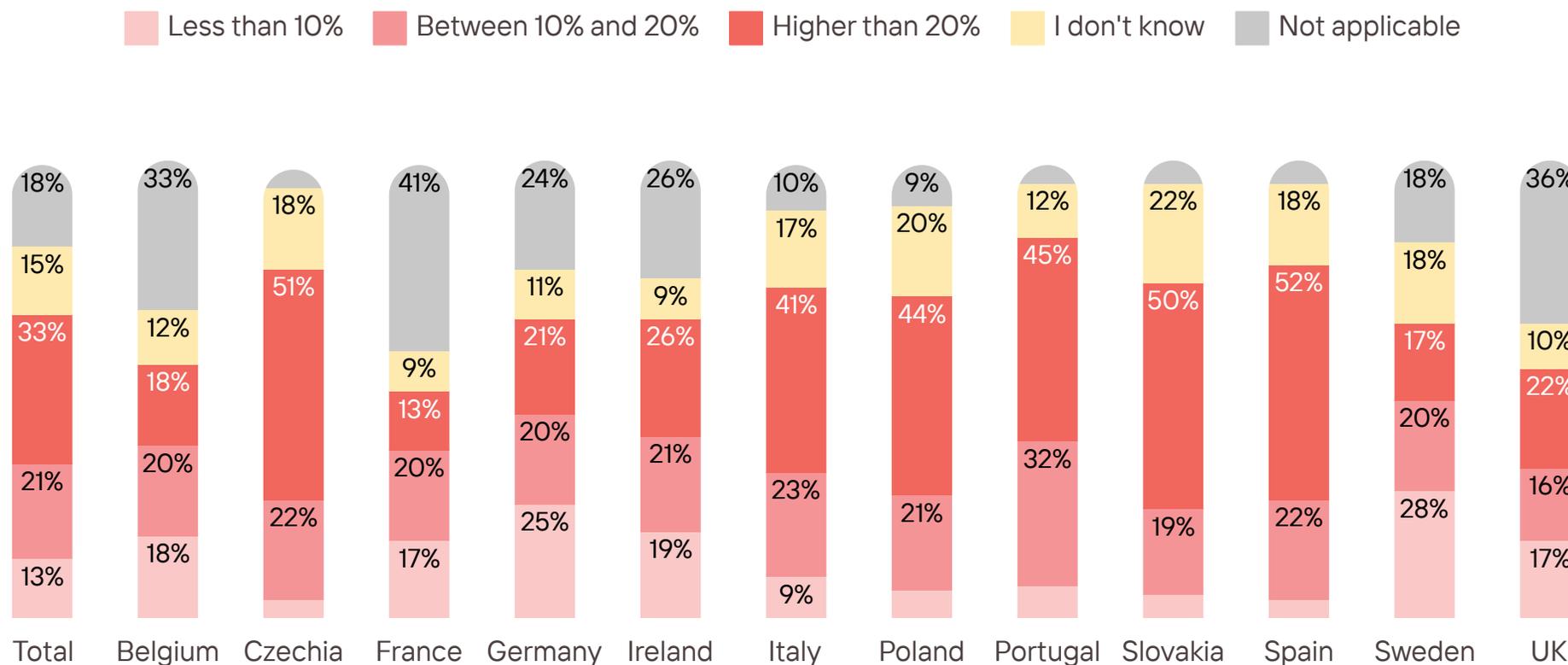
Childcare support availability and costs

Access to affordable and quality childcare is a significant issue, with the sources of childcare support for pre-school children varying widely across countries. For example, day-care support is notably higher in Sweden and Germany. **Family support** remains essential across all countries, serving as the primary childcare option in Spain and Slovakia and being equally prevalent as day-care in Belgium. In France, paid home support seems to play a larger role compared to other countries.



Childcare support for pre-school aged children (by country)

Childcare expenses represent over 20% of household income for 33% of families—a significant financial burden. Spain stands out with the highest proportion of parents (52%) spending more than 20% of their household income on childcare. In contrast, France has the lowest percentage, with only 13% of parents allocating the same share of their income to childcare.



Childcare expenses by country
(% of the total household income)

Recommendations & Conclusion

The challenges mothers face today are not theirs alone, **they affect society as a whole and demand a collective response.**

To truly support them, we must shift to a system that values **care** as vital to societal stability and well-being, sharing the collective responsibility of raising children. As the proverb says, “It takes a village to raise a child,” and now, it’s time for the village to support its mothers.



MMM recommendations

Enhance maternal mental health support

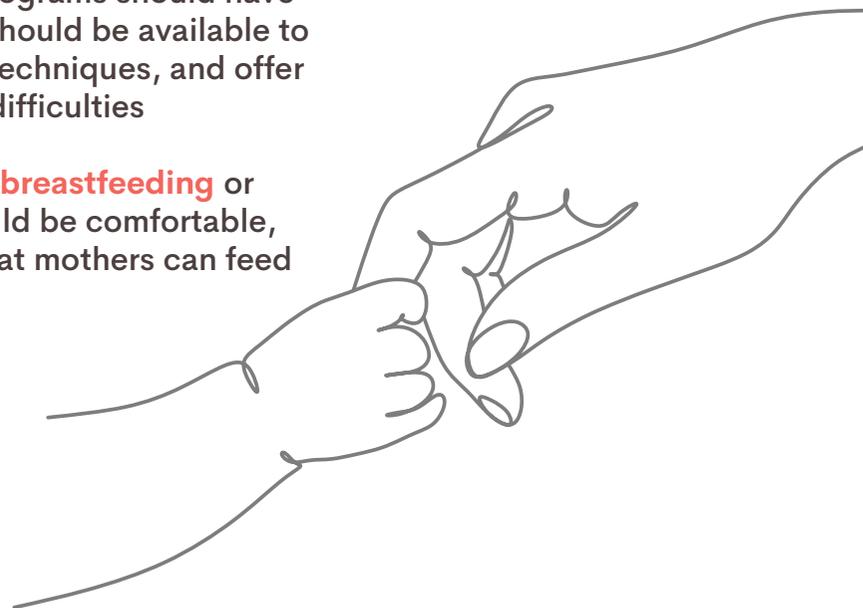
- Invest in and develop **decentralised and community-based mental health services**, that include a holistic approach to health that integrates both physical and mental well-being. Ensure this approach is **embedded across all services that mothers interact with**, during pregnancy but most importantly in the post-partum period, including gynecologists, general practitioners, pediatricians, psychologists, social workers, etc.
- Invest in research and **collect further data on maternal mental health** to better evaluate the symptoms, the demographics, and the support for mothers with mental health conditions
- **Include mental health as an integral part of health emergencies**, ensuring its protection and promotion to support overall well-being and resilience
- **Improve mental health literacy** with specific focus on the peripartum period, ensuring the sharing of culturally appropriate, linguistically diverse and user friendly information
- Invest in **screening tools and clinical guidelines tailored to all mothers**, with a particular attention on addressing the intersectional factors that intensify challenges for some, such as race, poverty, ethnicity, migrant status, and more



MMM recommendations

Expand specialised breastfeeding support

- Hospitals, community health centers, and maternal support programs should have **dedicated lactation consultants on staff**. These consultants should be available to provide individualized guidance, teach proper breastfeeding techniques, and offer emotional support to mothers, especially those experiencing difficulties
- **Workplaces should establish designated, private spaces for breastfeeding** or expressing milk to support working mothers. These areas should be comfortable, hygienic, and equipped with necessary amenities to ensure that mothers can feed or express milk safely and with dignity

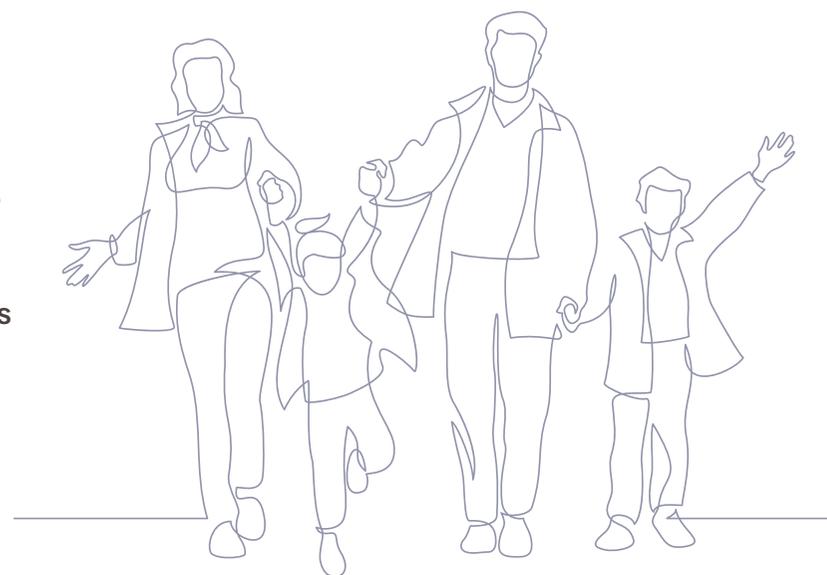


MMM recommendations

Promote family-friendly workplaces

Aimed at the EU decision makers

- Extend the current right, provided by the Work-Life Balance Directive, for parents to request flexible working conditions for children **up to age 18**
- Implement the **right to flexible working arrangements** (reduced working hours, flexible working hours, flexibility on the place of work, etc.) **rather than just the right to request** flexible working arrangements, as foreseen by the WLB Directive. Flexible working arrangements are fundamental during all the professional lives of parents, and specific attention has to be given to the **return from maternity leave**
- Ensure that **effective sanctions are implemented** across all Member States against discriminations based on family responsibilities in the workplace
- Monitor the full implementation of the **EU Pay Transparency Directive** to ensure the effective adoption of equal pay for work of equal value, alongside the Women on Boards Directive across the EU. Additionally, enhance the latter by extending its scope to **include unlisted companies and SMEs**, with a stronger emphasis on promoting gender equality in executive positions.



MMM recommendations

Aimed at the private sector

- Promote initiatives that help balance work and family life as part of CSR policies, such as Spain's EFR certificate (MMM Network member 'Más Familia') and France's 'Be Family' movement and certification (co-founded by MMM)
- Implement transformative policies ensuring companies adapt to workers' needs—especially for parents and caregivers, with a focus on mothers. Key actions include:
 - i. Offering flexible working options, like reduced hours (e.g., a 4-day week with no pay cut), flexible schedules, remote work, and the right to disconnect
 - ii. Providing easy reporting channels for parents facing discrimination due to caregiving responsibilities, such as through the use of digital tools
 - iii. Funding childcare centers and supporting family-friendly, development-focused childcare solutions
 - iv. Creating breastfeeding spaces
 - v. Supporting career development programs for mothers working part-time

MMM recommendations

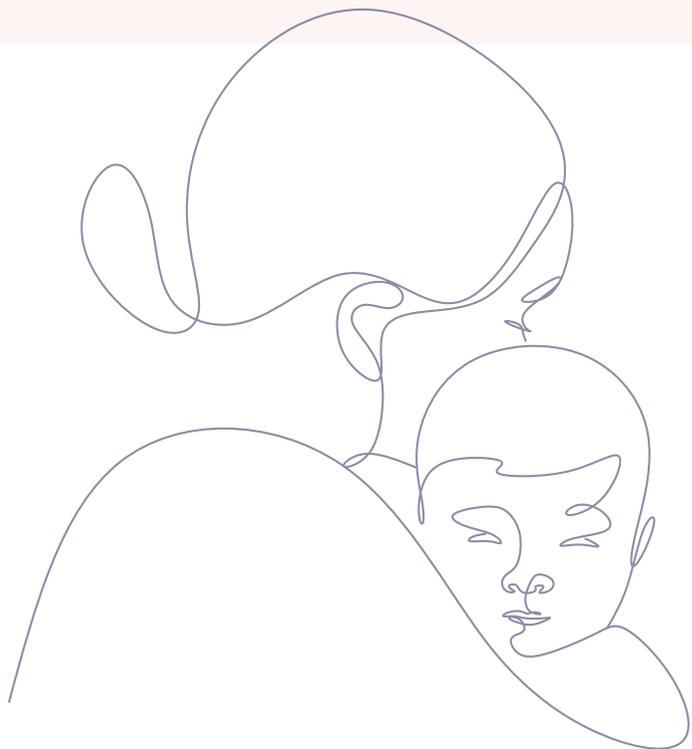
Recognize & Redistribute the unpaid family care work

Redefine "work" as a holistic concept that includes both paid and unpaid contributions, recognising unpaid work as essential and deserving of access to social rights such as social security, education, and training.

- Introduce '**care credits**' across all Member States to offset employment breaks taken to provide informal family care, ensuring these credits fairly contribute to **pension entitlements**
- Extend carer's leave, as outlined in Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance, beyond the current five days per year and make it mandatory with compensation. Ensure that remuneration for this leave is at least equivalent to the national sick pay level, recognizing the essential role of caregivers in society. Such compensated leave would apply to all situations in which individuals provide care for family members, including their children, other minor household members, the elderly, the sick, or individuals with disabilities
- Ensure that in all EU Member States parents, especially single parents and those with more than three children (large families), as well as those caring for a household member with disabilities or special needs, are entitled to **income transfers and pension enhancements**
- Since competencies between family and work life are transferable, it is essential to recognise and validate **skills gained through unpaid care work**. This can be achieved by developing a European certificate for family competencies, inspired by initiatives such as the French VAE system, the MAAM Tool, the FamCompass, the MOM Project, and private efforts like LifeFeed
- Conduct **time-use surveys more frequently**, with a focus on measuring time allocated to care and domestic work, and household composition
- Integrate a gender perspective into all policies
- **Raise awareness**—particularly in schools—of persistent gender biases that influence behavior within households, workplaces, and beyond

MMM recommendations

Improve & foster parental leaves

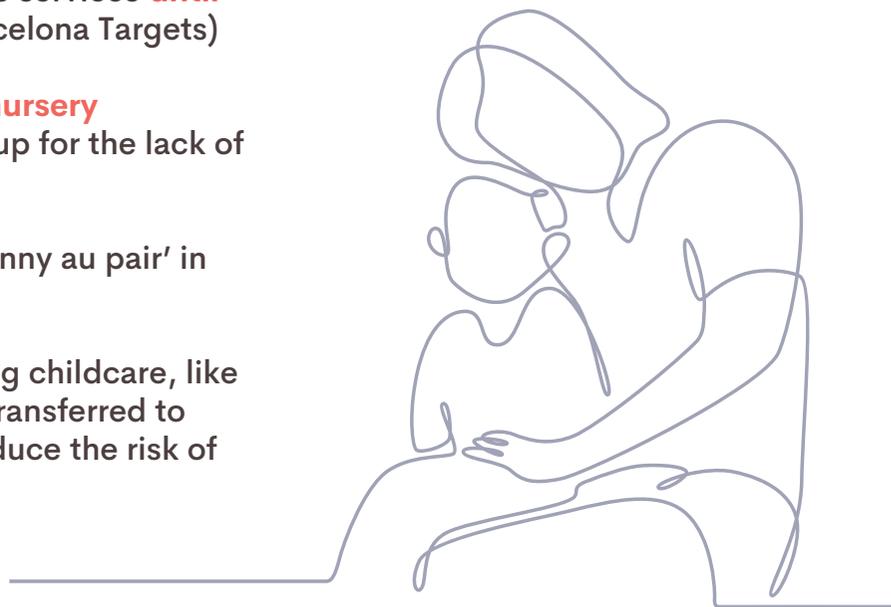


- Enhance and implement **longer and well-paid maternity, paternity (with at least one mandatory month for fathers), parental and carers leaves**. Flexibility and adaptability must be at the core of these policies, allowing families to tailor their leaves according to personal needs
- Ensure that the situation of the self-employed—representing nearly 25 million workers(7) or 12.7% of Europe's workforce—is considered so they can benefit from an EU framework on family leave schemes

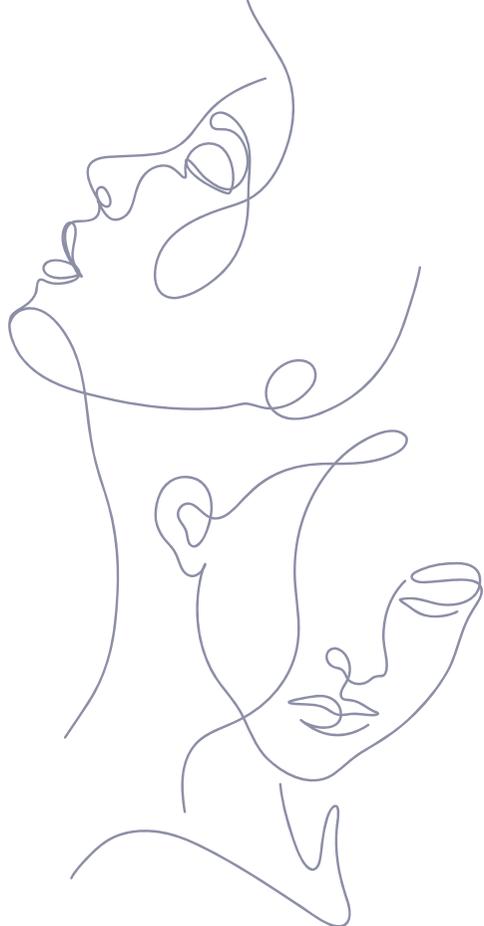
MMM recommendations

Provide quality & affordable childcare

- Give parents a **real choice among formal, informal and semi-formal childcare solutions**—such as community-based childcare services, 'gardiennes', childminders, or 'Granny au pair'—as well as the option to care for their under-school-age children themselves. This approach acknowledges the diverse needs of families while respecting early child development
- Provide accessible, affordable and of a high quality childcare services **until mandatory** school age that meet at least the EU targets (Barcelona Targets)
- Ensure decent revenues and proper working conditions for **nursery professionals** to properly recognise their work and to make up for the lack of attractiveness of the profession
- Support **intergenerational solidarity solutions** such as: 'Granny au pair' in Germany, Austria and The Netherlands
- Encourage systems that support older individuals in providing childcare, like Sweden's initiative allowing paid parental leave days to be transferred to grandparents, friends, or guardians. These measures also reduce the risk of poverty for mothers in old age



About Make Mothers Matter



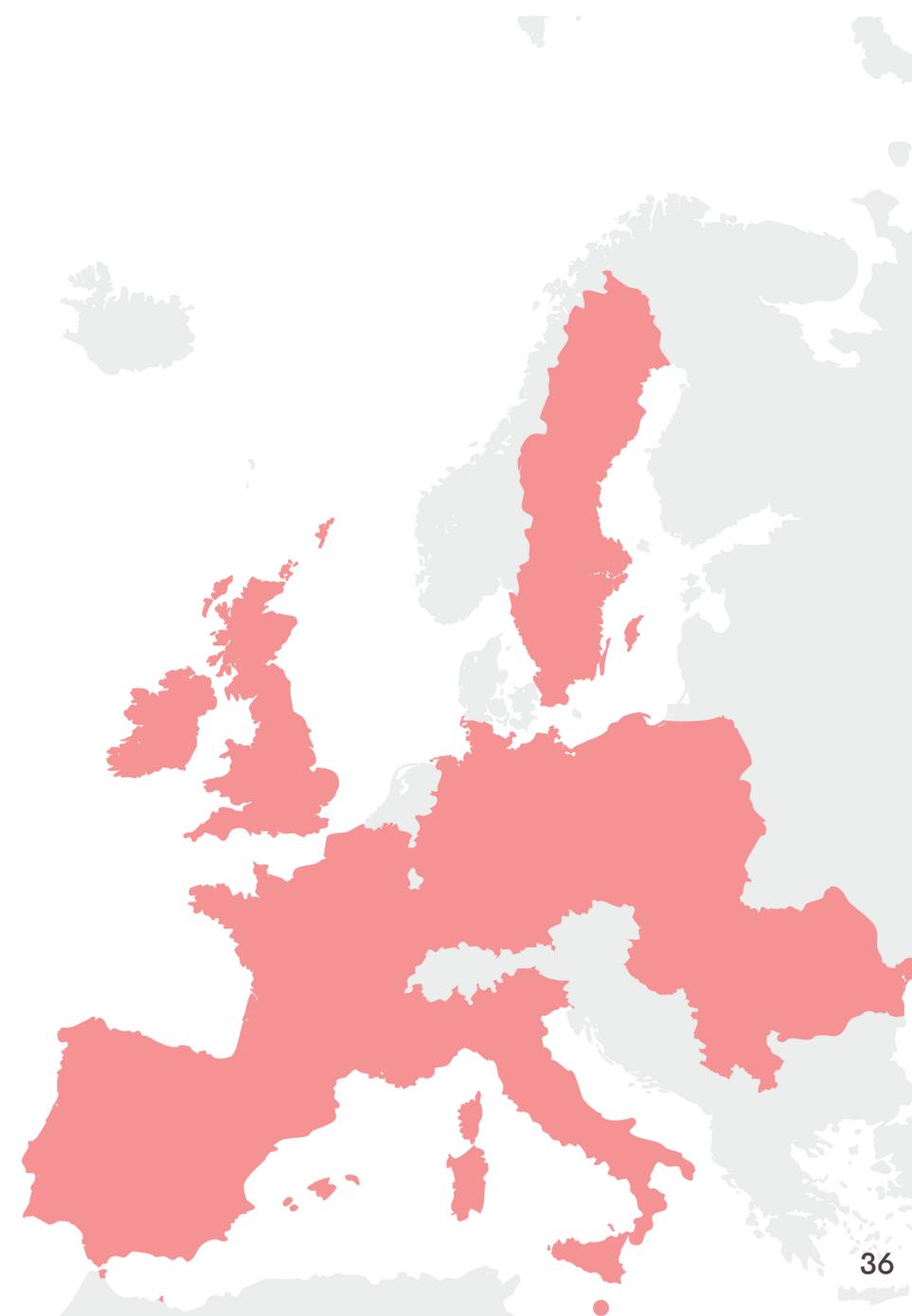
Since 1947, Make Mothers Matter (MMM) has been **advocating for the global recognition and support of mothers.** We collaborate worldwide with partners who lead local programs aimed at supporting mothers in their communities. This network allows our advocacy at the EU, UN, and UNESCO to represent the interests and realities of mothers around the world.



The sample

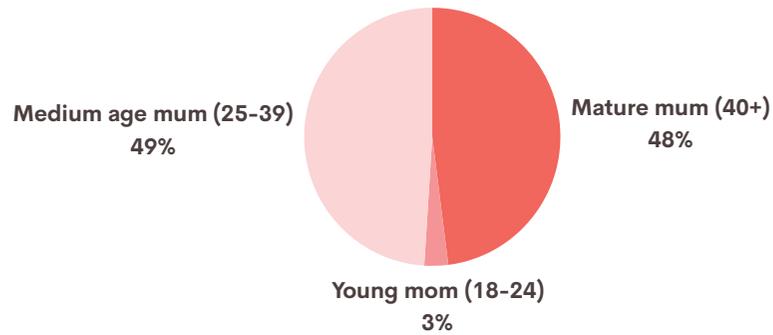
- Date of the survey: May 2024
- 49% of the women questioned were of medium age between 25 and 39 years old, while 48% were 40 years and above. Only 3% were between the ages of 18 and 24
- 80% were living with the co-parent and 20% did not
- 45% of the mothers had one child while 40% had two children and 15% had three or more
- 56% of the mothers had children aged between 6 and 17
- 74% of the mothers were working, 24% were not
- Only 34% reported being the main earner in the household, while 44% said the co-parent was the main earner, and 20% stated that both partners contributed equally
- 45% of mothers stated they have no/low or below average incomes, even though more than 40% have a university degree
- 25% consider themselves as 'carers', meaning that they live with a household member (a child or another adult) with additional care needs, that could be due to disability or health conditions (physical or mental) or other reasons

**Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany,
Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal,
Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, UK**

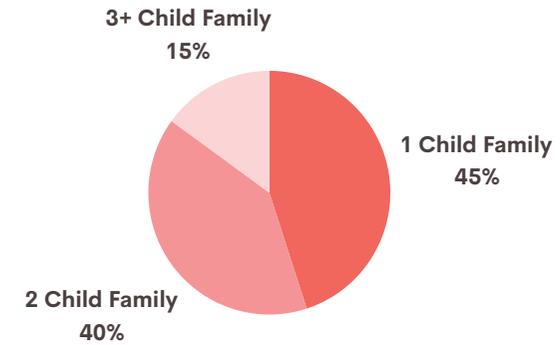


The sample

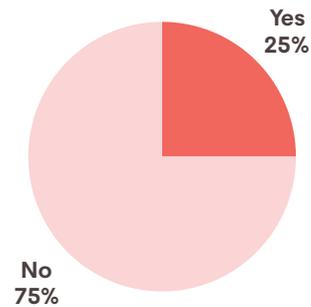
Mother's age



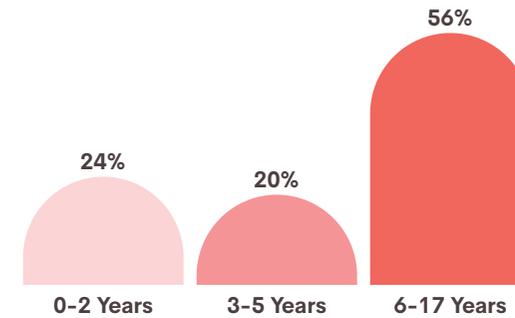
Number of children



I consider myself as carer

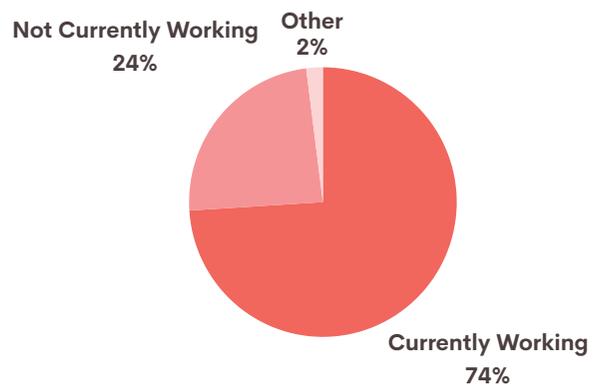


Children's age

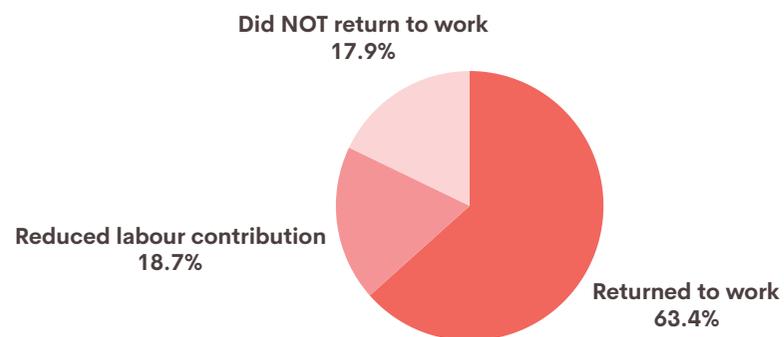


The sample

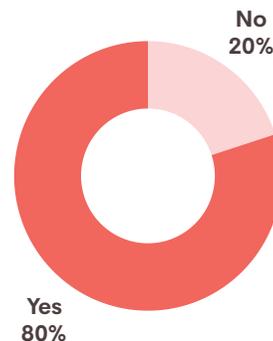
Working status



Returned to work (after ANY child)

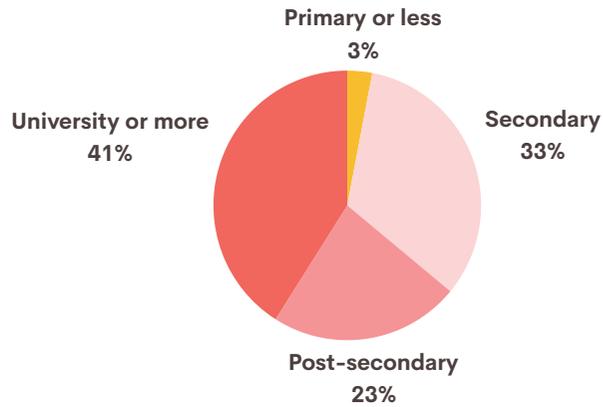


Living with co-parent

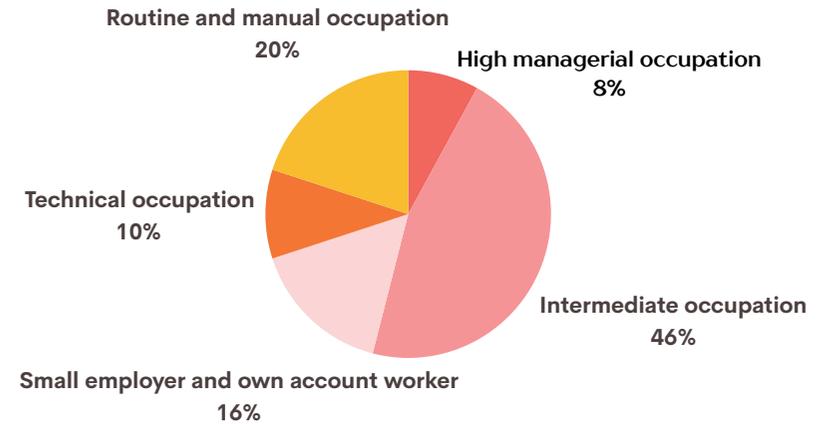


The sample

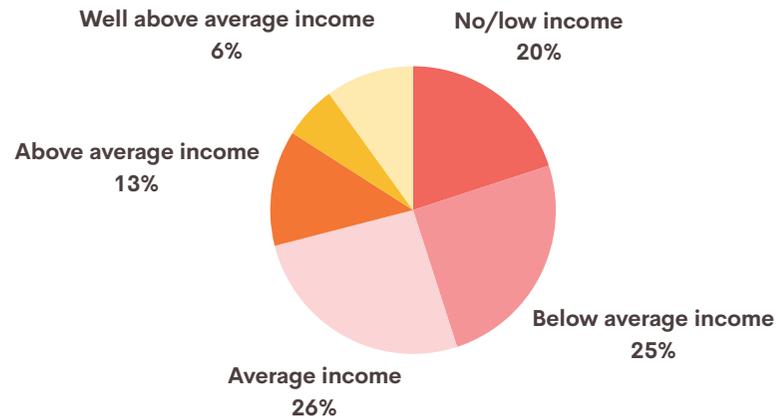
Education



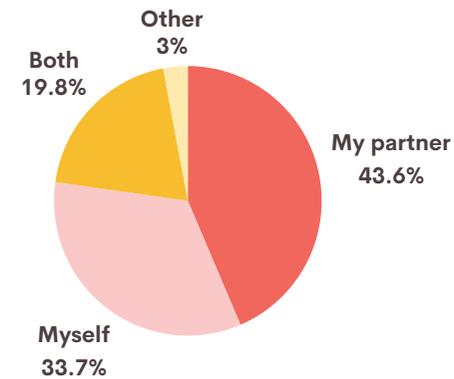
Occupation



Mother's personal income



Main income earner



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- (2) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023L0970>
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- (4) https://health.ec.europa.eu/document/download/cef45b6d-a871-44d5-9d62-3cecc47eda89_en?filename=com_2023_298_1_act_en.pdf
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https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Beginners:Labour_market_-_employment&oldid=414438#:~:text=Figures%20show%20that,%20by%202022,1.2%20thousand%20were%20family%20workers.

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